



No portion of this article may be reproduced without
express written permission of Style Publishing Group, LLC.
©2007 • All rights reserved.



Style Publishing Group
P.O. Box 1676
Frisco, Texas 75034
Phone: 972.335.1181
Toll Free: 877.781.7067
Fax: 214.722.2313

E-mail: info@friscostyle.com
Web: www.friscostyle.com

Ad Sales: (972) 335-1306

ANY LOVING PARENT WANTS THEIR CHILD TO GROW UP WITH GOOD SELF-ESTEEM, friendships, social and athletic outlets and feelings of accomplishment. Parents and families who have special needs children are no different in their desires for their children – all want their children to feel like they belong and are a welcome contributor to the community.

Three years ago, a Leadership Frisco class took that thought and ran with it. What started during a Disabilities Awareness Week progressed into an eagerly awaited local Frisco Special Olympics (FSO) organization that is continuously evolving to accommodate the increasing number of special needs children in Frisco and surrounding areas.

“I am just so darn happy we have Special Olympics in Frisco,” said mom Angie Whitley, who also serves as treasurer for FSO and has lived in Frisco since 1988. “I used to drive to Plano so Tony (now 13) could play soccer, and I even drove to Dallas for a special preschool, but all of that has changed. Frisco is a wonderful place.”

There is no fee to join the “Frisco Flyers,” the name chosen and proudly worn by Frisco’s Special Olympic athletes. True to its original creation by Eunice Kennedy Shriver in 1968, the Special Olympics’ main function is not only to help a child improve motor and social skills, but also, improve their confidence and self-esteem by helping them feel like they are part of a team.

The organization works to empower athletes both on and off the field, teaching them to overcome obstacles, learn self-reliance and teamwork, value friendships and experience the joys of competition. More information about FSO is offered on their website at www.friscospecialolympics.org.

“Sean’s favorite sport is track and field

because it’s the one time he is allowed to run away from us,” laughed Julie Tollefson, referring to her nine-year-old. “It’s wonderful to have your child be involved in something so inspiring, something they really get excited about with even little accomplishments.



Special Olympics Warm-ups

photo by Chris Johnson

Special Olympics Comes to Frisco

By Natalie Medigovich

Everyone is a winner.”

Tollefson added that parents bond with other parents in a natural support group from being together so much. The summer picnic at Warren Sports Complex and the Christmas party (courtesy of the Frisco RoughRiders) are other events associated with membership in FSO.

“It’s really wonderful how they [Special Olympics] customize events to include everyone, regardless of their disability,”

Tollefson explained. “Like if your child is in a wheelchair but wants to run track, they have wheelchair races; or if your child wants to play basketball but can’t hold the ball, they create something like throwing a tennis ball against the wall.”

Sixty-two athletes ranging in age from six to 29 years old come from Prosper, Little Elm, Anna, McKinney and Frisco to compete in bowling in the fall, basketball in the winter, track and field in the spring, golf and swimming in the summer.

Practices are held once a week for an hour and last eight to ten weeks culminating with one big competition.

The Frisco Flyers are part of Area 10 comprised of greater Dallas and surrounding counties including northeast Texas. Athletes and their families travel to McKinney, Mesquite, Allen, Richardson and Dallas.

“There are certain things I want to get accomplished before I leave the organization,” said returning FSO president Troy Pelias (a Leadership Frisco graduate responsible for its inception). “Like trying to build more foundational sponsors that will take us under their wing along with general fundraising. I’d like the kids to have trading cards or yard signs or sports photography, the things other kids who compete in sports may have. Maybe passive fundraising too, where a restaurant donates a portion of the night’s sales to our group...we need more people involved, and to build community awareness.”

Pelias added that long term goals include sending some local athletes to regional and state competitions and providing scholarships for travel accommodations. He would also like to secure a partnership with a local church to provide a respite night out for the parents of Special Olympic athletes, an idea that topped the list in a parents’ survey.



Special Olympics Practice

photo by Chris Johnson

Children can start practicing with the teams at age six, and begin competing at age eight. The children are eligible to compete at regional and state competitions when they reach age 12. The number of local athletes has more than doubled since Frisco Special Olympics' inauguration, so much so that the ever-present need for volunteers and sponsorships has grown accordingly.

Steve and Charlotte Lewis recently created a partnership with the Trails Golf Club for FSO athletes. The Lewis' also organized FSO's first annual golf tournament, slated for June 13, 2005 at the Trails, something they hope will be the organization's main fundraiser.

"We are looking to sign up 18 to 24 foursomes of players at an entry fee of \$125 per player," said Steve Lewis, who decided to help FSO after moving to Frisco. "We will recruit several sponsors to donate prizes and gifts that will be awarded and offered at a silent auction."

For more information on playing or helping to sponsor the golf tournament, contact Charlotte Lewis at 214.929.9827 or at charlottelewis1221@yahoo.com.

Twenty volunteers now help with FSO, and receive free training for their commitment. For more information on how you can volunteer contact Tony Deyoe at 972.668.2712 or at meadowhillier@aol.com.

"It's amazing to see the determination and accomplishment on the faces of the athletes," said Kristi Brown, FISD adapted physical education teacher. Brown has helped coach FSO athletes in every sport since the group's creation and has taught special education for eight

"We also have a high school program where kids can get a Physical Education credit for hooking up with a child who is a special needs child during gym class, and is their buddy..."

years. "They work hard and I enjoy every minute of it. My favorite thing to teach is special ed, and I enjoy athletics, so it is a great experience for both of us."

Debbie Lair, coordinator for special education for FISD, said there are about 1,600 special needs children in the district, of which 70% are learning disabled or in speech therapy. The remaining 30% are life skills and severely disabled students

who are Special Olympics candidates. Starting at age three, children can be enrolled in the FISD programs.

"We offer a parent's night out two or three times a semester free to parents with special needs children in the district," Lair said. "We started with 15 kids on these nights and now have 56, so we have had to move from Acker to the high schools for more room. We also have to rotate from either an elementary school parents' night out or a secondary school night out to split the kids up and accommodate for the increased number of workers needed."

Children have planned activities during these FISD respite nights (which usually last from 6 to 9pm) with specially trained caregivers where needed. Information regarding such resources go home with special needs children, as does information about Frisco Special Olympics.

Lair said an autism support group meets once a month and has an online discussion group. For more information, contact Debbie Lair at 469.633.6902.

"We also have a high school program where kids can get a Physical Education credit for hooking up with a child who is a special needs child during gym class, and is their buddy," Lair added. "Some kids in the high schools' Key Clubs or wrestling teams help us and can earn community service credits. It's wonderful."

Infants and toddlers from birth until the day before they turn three-years-old can use Early Childhood Intervention's (ECI) services, a local program where children with developmental delays or disabilities are treated in their natural environment (usually the home). For more information on ECI, call 972.377.7289.

"We have a very supportive administration and follow all federal, state and district rules," said Lair, who has been teaching special education classes for 25 years. "I have a real soft spot for these parents and their kids. It's a great program."

Natalie Medigovich is a freelance writer living in Frisco.